

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5557
JIM MILLER/HONG KONG

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CHINA PROFILE

ANNCR:

WORLD ATTENTION IS BEING DRAWN TO A SIGNIFICANT DEGREE TOWARD CHINA THIS WEEK, AS THE NATIONAL PEOPLES CONGRESS HOLDS ONE OF ITS RARE MEETINGS. FOR MANY PEOPLE IN THE WORLD, CHINA HAS ALWAYS BEEN A LAND OF MYSTERY AND INTRIGUE. CORRESPONDENT JIM MILLER PROVIDES THIS SKETCH OF THAT HUGE COUNTRY FROM HONG KONG:

VOICE:

WHEN EUROPEANS BEGAN TO VENTURE ACROSS THE SEAS IN GROWING NUMBERS -- ABOUT FIVE CENTURIES AGO -- THE EAST HELD A SPECIAL FASCINATION FOR THEM. THERE WERE GREAT STORES OF SPICES AND RICHES IN INDIA, JEWELS AND TREASURE IN THE COURTS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA. AND THE THIRTEENTH-CENTURY VENICIAN EXPLORER, MARCO POLO, HAD RETURNED FROM CATHAY, OR CHINA, WITH STORIES OF FABULOUS SILKS, JADE, AND WORKS OF FINE ART.

MARCO POLO'S STORIES, THE WORLD CAME TO LEARN, WERE TRUE. THE CHINESE EARLY ON DEVELOPED GREAT SKILLS IN THE ARTS, AND THEIR LAND WAS FILLED WITH ESTHETIC TREASURES. THE CHINESE APPEARED AT THE DAWN OF HISTORY AS A FARMING GROUP ALONG THE CENTRAL YELLOW RIVER. FROM THIS BEGINNING CAME A LOOSE FEUDAL EMPIRE DURING THE SHANG AND CHOU DYNASTIES, WHICH WAS THEN REPLACED BY A CENTRALIZED EMPIRE UNDER THE CHOU AND SUBSEQUENT DYNASTIES.

TWO CENTURIES BEFORE THE BIRTH OF CHRIST, CAME THE HAN DYNASTY, FROM WHICH THE CHINESE PEOPLE TOOK THEIR NAME. IT WAS DURING THAT DYNASTY THAT THE TEACHINGS OF CONFUCIUS WERE ADOPTED AS OFFICIAL IDEOLOGY, AND HE WAS REVERED AS CHINA'S GREATEST SAGE UNTIL DISCREDITED BY THE PRESENT REGIME.

THE CHINESE EMPIRE'S MOST BRILLIANT PERIOD OCCURRED DURING THE TANG DYNASTY, BEGINNING IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY AND LASTING FOR

THREE HUNDRED YEARS. THEN THE SUBSEQUENT SUNG DYNASTY FELL TO THE MONGOLS OF GENGHIS KHAN IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY. CHINESE RULE WAS NOT RESOTRED UNTIL THE MING DYNASTY, IN THIRTEEN-EIGHTY SIX. THE MING PERIOD WAS ENDED IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY BY THE CHING DYNASTY, WHICH IN TURN CAME UNDER PRESSURE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY FROM EUROPEANS, WHO FIRST WANTED TO OPEN CHINA TO THEIR TRADE AND WENT ON TO OBTAIN CONCESSIONS OF PORTS, TRACTS OF LEASED TERRITORY, AND OTHER PRIVILEGES.

THEN, IN NINETEEN-ELEVEN, THE CHING DYNASTY WAS OVERTHROWN BY FORCES WHOSE HERO WAS SUN YAT SEN.

FOLLOWING THE OVERTHROW OF THE CHING DYNASTY, CONFUSION REIGNED IN CHINA FOR MANY YEARS, CONTRIBUTED TO BY A JAPANESE INVASION IN NINETEEN THIRTY-ONE. GENERAL CHAING KAI-CHEK TRIED TO REUNITE THE COUNTRY DURING AND AFTER WORLD WAR TWO. BUT THE CHINESE COMMUNISTS, WHO WERE WELL ESTABLISHED IN THE NORTH OF THE COUNTRY, BROUGHT THE WHOLE NATION UNDER THEIR CONTROL AND PROCLAIMED THE PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA, ON OCTOBER FIRST, NINETEEN FORTY-NINE.

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JS/RTD